

News

World News Briefs

Venezuela's Guaidó Declares Himself President Amid Protests

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's crisis quickly escalated on Wednesday, as an opposition leader backed by the Trump administration declared himself interim president in a direct challenge to embattled socialist Nicolas Maduro, who retaliated by breaking off relations with the United States, his biggest trade partner.

For the past two weeks, ever since Maduro took the oath for a second six-year term in the face of widespread international condemnation, the newly-energized opposition had been preparing for nationwide demonstrations Wednesday coinciding with the anniversary marking the end of Venezuela's last military dictatorship in 1958.

While Maduro has shown no signs of leaving, his main rival, National Assembly President Juan Guaidó, upped the ante by declaring himself interim president before masses of anti-government demonstrators — the only way, he said, to rescue Venezuela from "dictatorship."

The U.S. led a chorus of Western hemisphere nations, including Canada, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, that immediately backed the bold challenge,

with President Donald Trump calling on Maduro to resign and promising to use the "full weight" of the U.S. economic and diplomatic power to push for the restoration of Venezuela's democracy.

"The people of Venezuela have courageously spoken out against Maduro and his regime and demanded freedom and the rule of law," Trump said in a statement.

It's Off: Pelosi Says No State of Union While Government Shut

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a high-stakes case of dare and double-dare, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi served notice Wednesday that President Donald Trump won't be allowed to deliver his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress next week. She took the step after Trump said he planned to show up in spite of Democratic objections to the speech taking place when big swaths of the government are shut down.

Denied that grand venue, Trump promised to come up with some sort of alternative event. But the White House was scrambling to find something matching the gravitas of the traditional address from the dais of the House to lawmakers from both parties, Supreme Court justices, invited guests and a tele-

vision audience of millions.

"I think that's a great blotch on the incredible country that we all love," Trump said. "It's a great, great horrible mark."

Fireworks over the speech shot back and forth between the Capitol and the White House as the month-long partial government shutdown showed no signs of ending and with about 800,000 federal workers facing the prospect of going without their second paycheck in a row come Friday.

Pelosi told Trump the House won't approve a resolution allowing him to address Congress until the shutdown ends. Trump shot back that Pelosi was afraid of hearing the truth.

States Move to Ease Restrictions on Child Sex-Abuse Lawsuits

NEW YORK (AP) — In many states across the U.S., victims of long-ago child sex-abuse have been lobbying for years, often in vain, to change statute of limitation laws that thwart their quest for justice. This year seems sure to produce some breakthroughs, due in part to the midterm election results and recent disclosures about abuse by Roman Catholic priests.

New York state is Exhibit A. The Democrats' takeover of the formerly

Republican-controlled Senate seems almost certain to produce a more victim-friendly policy in place of one of the nation's most restrictive laws.

Prospects are considered good for similar changes in Rhode Island and New Jersey, and the issue will be raised in Pennsylvania — which became the epicenter of the current abuse crisis in August when a grand jury accused some 300 Catholic priests of abusing more than 1,000 children over seven decades.

Abuse survivors and their allies are once again proposing a two-year window for now-adult victims to sue perpetrators and institutions over claims that would otherwise be barred by time limits. That provision was approved by the Pennsylvania House last year but rejected by the top Republican in the Senate.

Nationwide, only a handful of states — including California, Minnesota, Delaware and Hawaii — have created these "lookback windows" enabling victims to file civil lawsuits against institutions such as churches and youth groups that bore some responsibility for the abuse. California's one-year window opened in 2003, leading to hundreds of civil actions and more than \$1 billion in payouts by the Catholic church; activists and legislators in California hope to create a new lookback window this year.

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